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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 001772

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ISRAELI-ARAB POLITICIANS DECLARE DAY OF MOURNING,  
ORGANIZE DEMONSTRATION AGAINST YASIN ASSASSINATION

Classified By: Political Counselor Norm Olsen for reason 1.4 (b) and (d  
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1. (C) Summary. Israeli-Arab politicians rallied some 2,000 demonstrators in Nazareth March 23 to protest the GOI's assassination of Hamas leader Yasin. The Higher Arab Monitoring Committee, in conjunction with the more militant Islamic Movement, also declared March 23 a day of mourning. A Likud MK reportedly has asked the attorney general to bar the Nazareth event and to launch a criminal investigation against Arab MKs who express support for Yasin. Embassy contacts believe that Israeli Arabs, while sincerely disturbed about Yasin's assassination, are being stirred up by Israeli-Arab leaders. Police reportedly are concerned about spiraling Israeli-Arab violence in the days leading up to the March 30 "Land Day," the annual protest against land expropriation and general discriminatory treatment of Israeli Arabs. End summary.

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Israeli-Arab Politicians Unite to Protest Yasin Killing  
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2. (C) Israeli-Arab politicians and Knesset members have uniformly condemned the GOI's assassination of Hamas leader Shaykh Ahmad Yasin and have cooperated in organizing a demonstration during the afternoon of March 23 in the largest Israeli-Arab city, Nazareth. Early media reports estimate demonstration numbers around 2,000 persons. Israel Radio reported that someone pushing a wheelchair bearing a picture of Yasin led the demonstration. The Higher Arab Monitoring Committee (the Committee), which consists of Israeli-Arab political representatives, Knesset members, and Arab municipality heads, reportedly agreed to work with the more militant Islamic Movement, centered in Umm al-Fahm, to organize the demonstration in Nazareth. According to Jafar Farah, director of the Mossawa Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens in Israel, Israeli-Arab politicians were pushing for the demonstration, something that many in the Israeli-Arab community, he believes, may not have strongly supported. Farah expressed concern that it may not be wise for Israeli Arabs to connect themselves with Hamas. He added, however, that there certainly was "general frustration in the Israeli-Arab street." Farah worried that Umm al-Fahm leaders could allow things to get out of control at the demonstration. "They don't have much to lose," Farah said of the Umm al-Fahm leaders, "since their main leaders are in prison." (Note: Farah was referring to jailed Islamic Movement Northern Branch leader Sheikh Ra'ad Salah and former mayor of Umm al-Fahm Suleiman Aghbaria.)

3. (C) Yair Ettinger, Ha'aretz reporter on Israeli-Arab issues, told poloff on March 23 that the rhetoric among Israeli-Arab politicians has grown more "militant" in response to Yasin's assassination. MKs Talab el-Sana and Ahmed Tibi both said publicly that the GOI's actions against Yasin represented "insanity." MK el-Sana reportedly canceled a March 22 meeting he had scheduled with PM Sharon. Ettinger pointed out that all the Arab parties in the Knesset have united around the Yasin issue. He stressed, however, that there has always been a gap between the more moderate Israeli-Arab community and its political leaders. Yair questioned whether Israeli Arabs felt comfortable "standing side-by-side with Gaza to protest Yasin's death."

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Likud MK Angered over Israeli-Arab Reaction  
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4. (SBU) Right-wing Likud MK Gilad Erdan reportedly petitioned Attorney General Menachem Mazuz on March 23 to bar the Nazareth demonstration and has called for a criminal investigation against the leader of the Committee and the Arab MKs participating in the demonstration, for expressing support for Yasin. Ha'aretz reported on March 23 that in a letter to the AG, Erdan wrote that "the Arabs of Israel always claim they're second class citizens, and today some of them are acting as first-class enemies. This phenomenon must be uprooted." In response, The Mossawa Center reportedly called on Mazuz to try MKs who incite against Israeli Arabs.

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Land Day Protest  
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15. (C) The Committee has also announced a general strike in the Israeli-Arab community to mark the annual "Land Day" on March 30. "Land Day" rallies and strikes have been held annually to commemorate the March 30, 1976 killing of six Israeli Arabs who were protesting the expropriation of Arab-owned land in Israel. Ettinger noted that last year's Land Day rallies did not draw many people, as Land Day occurred during the U.S. war with Iraq. He predicted a larger turnout this year. Police reportedly are concerned that the climate in the Israeli-Arab community is such that violence could erupt in the days ahead and especially on Land Day.

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